

The Ballarat Naturalist

December 2006



Trailing Goodenia
Goodenia lanata
(Club Logo)

STELLA BEDGGOOD MEMORIAL LECTURE 2006 – 3 NOVEMBER 2006

Fifty four members and guests attended the Stella Bedggood Memorial Lecture. The club was pleased to welcome those who had travelled to be with us including Ron and Yvonne Bishop from Maryborough who have come to every lecture and Ern and Lesley Perkins from Castlemaine. Graham and his mother Lois Reynolds, Edith and Edna Fry and the Smerdons were also welcomed.

As usual, the room looked resplendent with native flowers grown by members and photographs taken by members, particularly John Williams with a beautiful, mounted, named display..

The address was delivered by Professor Martin Westbrooke, Director of the Centre for Environmental Management at the University of Ballarat. Martin's address was titled "Von Mueller's Contribution to the Botany of Victoria".

The lecture provided a thorough account of Von Mueller as a person and of his work in Victoria.

Von Mueller was born at Rostock, Germany in 1825. He was apprenticed to a chemist (pharmacist) at 15. In those days a major part of pharmacy was the study of botany, providing him with the background for his later work. He received the degree of doctor of philosophy at Kiel in 1847 when he was 22. His decision to emigrate to Australia was influenced by his early life. Both his parents died of tuberculosis and in 1843 his elder sister also died of this disease. As a consequence of his fear for his own health and that of his two sisters, he emigrated with them to South Australia for the warmer climate. It was obviously his intention from the start to remain in Australia as he was naturalised in 1849.

He worked in South Australia as a chemist but also immediately on arrival started exploring and writing about the flora of the area travelling to Mt Lofty, Lake Alexandrina and the Murray Mallee. He mostly travelled on his own, probably because others could not keep up with him. From 1850 he published on Australian flora in Germany and the United Kingdom.

In 1853 he was appointed Victorian Government Botanist, a position he held until his death in 1896. He almost immediately began to personally survey the flora of Victoria travelling to Mt Buffalo, Mt Buller, Port Albert and Wilsons Promontory. Late in 1853 he journeyed to the Grampians, Mallee, North Victoria, Alps and the Snowy River area. In his first year as Government Botanist he travelled 5,000km mostly on horseback and collected 1,500

specimens. Early in 1854 he was off to Cape Otway and Sealers Cove then in late 1854 he visited the Alps again and Mount Kosciusko.

Whilst remaining as Government Botanist he also travelled on the Great Northern Expedition in 1855/56 and held positions as Curator of the Melbourne Zoo from 1858 to 1862 and Director of the Botanic Gardens from 1857 to 1873.

The Northern Australia expedition was another example of his prolific travel during which he ventured 300 miles into the Great Australian Desert being there 2 months and travelling with seven others 7,000 miles across Northern Australia to Brisbane.

Whilst widely admired, not everyone agreed with him. His ideas on establishing the Botanic gardens as a scientific collection of plants resulted in him being replaced as Director by William Guilfoyle as the authorities preferred a park like garden.

As well as plant discovery Von Mueller valued and wrote on the economic value of plants, with hindsight making some statements that are not agreed with now. He wrote the gorse is “important for covering quickly drift sand on our coast” although it must be added that he also said it was “not good for hedges”. He promoted *Pinus radiata* saying it was “a splendid pine – remarkably rapid growth”, recognised blue gums sending specimens to Italy, sent saltbush to Arizona and said that blackberry “deserves to be naturalised along the edge rivulets in our ranges”.

In total, during Von Mueller’s time as Government Botanist 700,000 specimens were added to the herbarium collection with 20,000 collected personally by Von Mueller. Similar numbers were sent overseas. The mammoth size of this is put in perspective by the fact that only about 200,000 have been added since.

Von Mueller wrote 800 scientific works. Martin had a few of his books on display including one titled “Introduction to Botanic Teaching, The Schools of Victoria, Botany for School Students” and another on the selection of plants which was widely used in India. His “Key to Victorian Plants Vol 1 and 2” was not replaced until the 1930s.

Von Mueller prompted education on the recognition of plants and sent sets of mounted specimens to Mechanics Institutes. The Ballarat Mechanics Institute still has its set.

He was also a School of Mines Examiner and Martin had a list of examination questions for the School of Mines in Von Mueller’s handwriting.

Ferdinand Von Mueller was a pharmacist, botanist, taxonomist, explorer, geographer, horticulturist and prolific writer. He was recognised during his lifetime, being made a Baron by Germany in 1871 and Knighted by Queen Victoria in 1879. It is interesting that he is referred to as Baron Ferdinand Von Mueller and not Sir as would be associated with the knighthood. His name is also remembered through geographic names in most if not all states of Australia.

The lecture was followed by supper. Thank you to Martin Westbrooke for delivering the address and to club members for their work in preparing the venue and providing an enjoyable supper. The evening was again a fitting recognition of Stella Bedggood and other members who have contributed to the club and the natural history in the past.

Peter Dalman

EXCURSION: MUSICAL GULLY ROAD AND BELMONT HOME NEAR BEAUFORT – 5 NOVEMBER 2006

Nine cars with a total of 29 members and guests enjoyed this excursion led by Bill Murphy and his daughter Chris Chapman. It was wonderful for the club to have a number of Bill and Pat's children including Graeme and his wife Joan with their three children and Marg. With Greg and Genny's daughter, Kirsten and grandchildren Anna Grace and Sebastian, the day was quite a family affair.

The first stop was in Beaufort to reassemble the group after travelling along the highway from Ballarat. The short break enabled the architecture of the Mechanics Institute, bandstand and fire brigade buildings to be admired and a reflection to be made on the number of Mechanics Institutes that must have been established. The convoy then travelled along to Musical Gully Road and stopped near the reservoir. Jo Reid later advised that the pleasant sounding name for the area was because the early miners were mostly Italians and at night accordions and other musical instruments could be heard from their camps.

As everywhere, the bush here was very dry and specimens observed were generally stunted. However, there was enough colour to maintain interest with the following flowers being noted: Cranberry heath (*Astroloma humifusum*), Milkmaids (*Burchardia umbellata*), Black-anther flax-lily (*Dianella revoluta*), Common wedge pea (*Gompholobium huegelii*), Trailing goodenia (*Goodenia lanata*) – the club's emblem, Heath tea-tree (*Leptospermum myrsinoides*), Common beard heath (*Leucophogon virgatus* var. *virgatus*), Grey everlasting (*Oxothamnus obcordatus*), Common flat-pea (*Platylobium obtusangulum*), Matted bush-pea (*Pultenaea pedunculata*) and Grass trigger-plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*). Trees observed were Red stringy bark (*Eucalyptus macroryncha*), Fine leaf peppermint (*Eucalyptus radiata*) and Scentbark (*Eucalyptus aromaphloia*) the bark of which was explored to show the children its classical odour. Those who ventured away from the group reported considerable gorse and broom with one of the gorse plants showing webs of the introduced gorse mite and the control effects of the mite. Few birds were seen in this area with the dam only yielding a great pied cormorant, two intermediate black cormorants and four black ducks.



It was then off to "Belmont", the home of Jo Reid who had invited us to enjoy lunch around her picturesque dam. The home "Belmont" was originally built by Jo's great grandfather, James Fraser Watkin who was a surveyor. He settled in Buninyong and in 1857 was commissioned to survey the Surface Hill Channel between Beaufort and Raglan. He apparently liked the area so much that he acquired land in the area and began building the

homestead which has remained in the same family ever since.

During lunch we were welcome to explore the house garden and farm buildings. The garden was resplendent with a variety of classical plants including camellias, honesty, roses, poppies, Sweet Williams, lilacs, rhododendrons, iris, and others as well as various fruit trees such as fig and mulberry.

There were also some fascinating historic structures. A stable on a slope enabled fodder to be placed from road level into the loft whilst horses entered down the hill into the lower section. A piggery ruins in the creek bed was apparently originally located there so water could be directed through the centre facilitating cleaning. Other structures included a brick buttressed wall and a machinery shed built over the creek. The house itself had interesting decorative timber work on the veranda and a cellar originally for storing fruit from the orchard.

In the afternoon Jo escorted us through a 10 acre area that she had fenced in 2001 to exclude kangaroos and rabbits, then burnt using a controlled burn in 2004. Jo had observed that unlike present days, in her early years it was very rare to see a kangaroo or wallaby on the property with the sight of one creating considerable excitement. In her memory there were more wild flowers. Also, her grandfather had told her that in 1857 the vegetation was much more open woodland, having big trees with grassland between. Jo's theory was that the introduced honey bee is a much better pollinator than native bees and that more prolific germination of trees has been one of the consequences. Along the perimeter fence it was easy to see the difference made by excluding stock and native grazing. Whilst Jo said that

in better years the flowers would have been significantly more prolific we were still able to observe Grey parrot pea (*Dillwynia cinerascens*), Narrow leaf bitter pea (*Daviesia leptophylla*), Trailing shaggy pea (*Podolobium procumbens*), Common hovea (*Hovea heterophylla*), Common wedge pea (*Gompholobium huegelii*), Grey everlasting (*Oxothamnus obcordatus*), Heath milk wort (*Comesperma ericinum*), Curled everlasting (*Helichrysum scorpi-*



odes), Trailing goodenia (*Goodenia lantana*), Slender rice flower (*Pimelea linifolia* subsp. *linifolia*), Slender dodder-laurel (*Cassytha glabella*), Blue pincushion (*Brunonia australis*), Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia* sp.), Thin leaf wattle (*Acacia aculeatissima*), Common correa (*Correa reflexa*), Cherry ballart (*Exocarpos cuneiformis*), Hedge wattle (*Acacia paradoxa*), Common flat pea (*Platylobium obtusangulum*), Kangaroo apple (*Solanum* sp.) with lots of Heath tea tree (*Leptospermum myrsinoides*). It was good to see small cherry ballart showing there is regeneration.

Birds observed: straw necked ibis, grey thrush, striated pardalote, eastern spine-

bill, yellow faced honeyeater, New Holland honeyeater, yellow rumped thornbill, striated thornbill, goldfinch, mistletoe bird, chough, crimson rosella, Australian raven, magpie, white throated tree creeper, kookaburra, corella, sulphur crested cockatoo, rufous whistler, superb fairy wren.

Thanks to Bill Murphy and his daughter Chris Chapman for their organisation and leadership on the day. Thanks to Pat Murphy for the provision of a comprehensive reference plant list, to Jo Reid for welcoming us to her property and to Ken Hammond for the bird list.

Peter Dalman

EXCURSION : LITTLE RIVER EARTH SANCTUARY 19TH NOVEMBER 2006.

After a very warm afternoon, 17 members and visitors gathered at the sanctuary soon after 7pm, glad to feel a cooler breeze! We were soon shown to the house which now houses the Mt Rothwell Grassland Services offices, where we enjoyed an alfresco meal together, looking over an enormous vista of golden paddocks and wonderful high cloud formations, to a loud accompaniment of cockatoos!

As dusk began to fall, we were gathered together by our guide, Annette, who told us about the history of the sanctuary, the geology of the area, and the fauna that we would hopefully see that evening.

The sanctuary is situated between the You Yangs and the Brisbane ranges. The You Yangs are residual granite formations which came into being 365 million years ago, in the Devonian era. 4 million years ago, the whole area except the You Yangs was under water, but then the volcanic Anakie peaks formed, flooding the area with lava flows and driving back the sea, leaving the landscape to weather to the form we see today.

In 1873, Robert Chirnside, a relative of the Werribee Chirnsides, built the Mount Rothwell homestead, and the family owned the property until 2000 when it was purchased for the Earth Sanctuary. Various financial problems have beset the sanctuary, which receives no government funding, and so the old homestead, where supper was eaten on last year's visit, has now been sold. The sanctuary itself has two main functions; conservation of endemic species, and tourism. We gathered from Annette that the balance between the two is not always easy, and the economics are not always favourable!

Near the offices is a rugged granite outcrop, which is now the home to a group of

36 Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies (not seen by us at that time). They are now much safer as a wily old resident fox, which had evaded eviction for some time, has at last been dispatched by an expert! Annette then took us to an area of cages, which now houses only one Brush-tailed Phascagole. This female is now 5yrs old (normal lifespan 3 yrs), but was extremely active, and quite fascinating to watch. She feeds largely on insects, but they are capable of catching mice and sometimes even chickens, which seems amazing in view of their small size. They are classified now as threatened species, and have suffered badly during the drought years, often drowning in water tanks. They need old tree hollows to nest in, and tend to be solitary animals, meeting briefly to mate. Their young attach themselves to teats in a fold of skin, not a pouch, and then climb on to the mother's back when they are old enough.

The caged area used to be the home of a breeding programme for Eastern Quolls, the most successful one in Australia. Quolls would have been very common before European settlement, but their numbers had been almost wiped out by habitat loss and predation by foxes and cats particularly. The breeding programme has been so successful that it has now been disbanded, as the quolls seem to be doing well on their own. Annette told us that they become quite friendly, and even come to share her meals sometimes! One was quite partial to lasagne! Black Quolls are now also present in the sanctuary.

Near the caged area we had our first encounter with a wild species, a Southern Brown Bandicoot, foraging on its own for insects, spiders, seeds and berries. These are small marsupials with a rear-opening pouch. This stops dirt entering the pouch as they dig, or rummage in leaf litter when they look for food.

Annette then took us through the gate into the sanctuary, which covers 750 hectares. The fence has been specially designed to keep out foxes, cats and rabbits, but is low enough to allow kangaroos to jump over. It is a complex structure, which made it expensive to install, at \$15,000 to \$20,000 per kilometre, and 21km in length, but appears to be effective. Computer and visual checks are carried out very frequently to monitor its condition, and repair any damage as soon as possible.

By this time, it was really quite dark, and we were glad of Annette's large torch as well as our own smaller ones to show up an amazing number of animals, who generally seemed fairly unmoved by our presence. We very soon saw numerous Brush-tailed Possum, foraging on the ground, many with youngsters on their backs.

This was soon followed by numerous sightings of :

- Long-nosed Potoroo, a small ancestor of modern kangaroos, totally herbivorous (a 'roo small enough for the pot!)
- Rufous Bettong, an omnivorous creature with a tail sufficiently prehensile to carry bundles of bedding material!
- Red-bellied Pademelon, from Tasmania, but happily resettled at Little River.
- Southern Brown Bandicoot, doing a lot of digging, and leaving conical pits in

the ground.

- Eastern barred Bandicoot, with 3-4 whitish bars across its rump
- Eastern Quoll, mostly at a distance, running with quick, agile graceful movements
- Red-necked Wallaby, with distinctly ginger-brown fur on the neck and shoulders.
- Ring-tailed Possum, smaller and much lighter built than the brushtailed, and much more arboreal.

There are apparently three species of owl living in the sanctuary, Barn, Tawny and Boobook, but only one very brief sighting of a Barn Owl was made by a few members of the group. We were not lucky enough to spot a Sugar Glider, although there are some resident there.

Annette was a really wonderful guide, with an obvious love for her work and a huge interest in the animals she is working to support. She gave us lots of information about the species we saw, the work the team does to keep predators and weeds out, and the sort of environment that these native animals really need to survive.

For us, it felt like a visit to a part of Australia before European settlement. The very mixed cover, with some magnificent old trees, lots of fallen branches and leaf litter, plenty of understorey and no non-indigenous predators obviously provides a habitat in which these creatures can thrive. We were thrilled to see them at such close quarters, and some of us were able to get some amazing photographs.

All in all, it was a wonderful evening, and a memorable experience for all who attended.

Alison Williams November 2006.

Happy Christmas!

Don't forget Friday Dec. 15th
Christmas Gathering at Carol Hall's



CALENDAR

December

Fri 1 Speaker—Hedley Thompson
Sun 3 BEN Excursion—Kurtis Noyce

Fri 15—Christmas Gathering at Carol Hall's, 5 Elizabeth St, Wendouree . BYO chairs, crockery, cutlery, drinks, meat, and a salad or dessert to share.



2007

Tues Jan 16—Committee Meeting at John & Elaine Gregurke's, 1 John St, Wendouree, 7.30pm

Fri Feb, 2 Paul Norquay—School of Horticulture SMB—*Water*

Sun Feb 4 Ballarat Reservoirs—Les Hanrahan

Advance notice—ANN get-together in the NT—May 10-18, 2008 based in the Mary River area.

Committee

President Mr Peter Dalman

Vice-President..... Mr Greg Binns

Secretary Mrs Carol Hall

Treasurer Mr Les Hanrahan

Miss Helen Burgess.....

Mrs Claire Dalman

Miss Maureen Christie.....

Mr John Williams.....

Mr John Gregurke

Mrs Alison Williams

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Meetings are held at Ballarat Horticultural Centre, cnr. Gregory & Gillies Sts (VicRoads 254 F8) on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm.

Excursions: Depart from Ballarat Market Place (formerly Creswick Plaza) Creswick Rd., Ballarat (VicRoads 255 M10) at 9.30am unless otherwise specified.

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